

STELLA

MONTICELLI

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THE TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CORCORAN BALL

SPONSORED BY
THE TRUSTEES AND THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE
OF THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART

STELLA SINCE 1970

and

MONTICELLI, HIS CONTEMPORARIES, HIS INFLUENCE

APRIL 20, 1979





A WELCOME FROM THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

The Women's Committee welcomes you to the Annual Corcoran Ball. Whether this is your first or twenty-fourth year of attending the Ball, we hope it will become a yearly tradition for you. Since the Ball is our major fund raising event for the Gallery, your continuing support is greatly appreciated.

This is a very special year for us because we are celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary. The Committee hopes that the 1979 Corcoran Ball, with the accompanying exhibitions of paintings by Frank Stella and Adolphe Monticelli, will be a spectacular climax to this memorable year.

Frank Stella, *Mysterious Bird of Ulieta*, 1977, 100 x 126", Collection Paul Cornwall-Jones, London, England

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AN INTRODUCTION FROM THE DIRECTOR

Since the end of World War II the face of Washington has been changing at a dazzling pace. Buildings seem to rise and fall with such regularity that construction sites are becoming an integral part of our life-style. Growth of the performing arts, new and improved museum complexes, and innovative educational centers today mark the Federal City as a cultural force of great magnitude. Commercially, too, the Washington community wears a broad smile. It is without a doubt enjoying a boom which few would have predicted a decade or two ago. The renovation of decayed neighborhoods, office buildings, hotels, and high rise condominiums abound. Everywhere we look, the theme is clear: action, optimism, and growth are the shibboleths of a forward-looking philosophy.

In an odd sort of way, this modern vitality is at variance with the historic purposes of Washington, the Federal City beautiful. As opposed to older commercial centers such as New York and Chicago where novelty and change have ruled, the Nation's Capital was envisioned as a show place for permanent, unchanging values; a place where all citizens could come for a respite and a refresher course in America's first principles. Monuments and classical-style buildings were erected to establish a sense of tradition and to instill within the citizen a firm sense of Thomas Jefferson's self-evident truths. In this spirit, art

museums abound in Washington. They exist in the hope that sound aesthetic principles will help us to remain sensitive and alert to the character of our physical environment.

The Corcoran has been in Washington since 1869. Initially at the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 17th Street, and now at New York Avenue and 17th Street, this grand Gallery has served the city and the Nation in very special ways: first as a keeper of America's fine artistic tradition and second as an experimental laboratory where the new and the untried can receive a public audience. Thus, the Corcoran shares the duality of purpose and image found in Washington itself. Balancing the old and the new, the Corcoran thrives on the creative tension between the past and the present.

Since its founding in 1869, the Corcoran Gallery of Art has dedicated its energies to teaching all of us to see more acutely and to showing us how to create works of art which may have been the ephemera of our dreams. As both a museum and a school, the Corcoran is unique in Washington; it is also a private institution which is proud of its independence. The School offers a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, a diploma, and open courses for anyone wanting to try his or her skills. The Museum focuses on historic American art, the avant garde, fine art photography, the art of the Washington area, and European art as it supplements both the American Collection and the

exquisite works in the William A. Clark Collection of the Corcoran.

The Corcoran is operated in the belief that the great art museum does not seek to tell us what we already know, but to stretch our imaginations, to combine order and adventure so that when we leave the exhibitions or the classrooms, we are just a little bit different from when we awoke that morning.

It is hoped the current exhibitions fulfill this creed.

"Monticelli: His Contemporaries, His Influence" includes the works of this French master, who is well represented in the Corcoran's Clark Collection, as well as works by Van Gogh, Cezanne, Matisse, Redon, and Soutine, who were all influenced by Monticelli. Yet despite his own work and an extensive sphere of influence that touched American painters like Ryder and Prendergast, Monticelli is unknown to most Americans. He deserves a closer look.

The Corcoran Women's Committee is sponsoring the Monticelli exhibition as only one of many projects the Committee is undertaking in celebration of its twenty-fifty anniversary.

The second exhibition, *"Stella Since 1970,"* contains works of art created nearly a century after Monticelli. These works are enormous, three-dimensional constructions which have received acclaim throughout Europe and America. One cannot help but wonder just what Adolphe Joseph Thomas Monticelli would think if he could climb the steps to the upper atrium galleries and see Frank Stella's creations. Though Monticelli could never have had that opportunity, the Corcoran affords it to us. The Corcoran's exhibitions enable us to compare the works of a modern American genius with the paintings of an earlier French master. And here, we are getting to the heart of the Corcoran's purpose: to give the public the chance

to compare, interpret, and understand art with an open mind and with a willingness to grow.

We are deeply grateful to the Ford Motor Company Fund for sponsoring this publication and for bringing *"Stella Since 1970"* to the Corcoran. A private corporation assisting a private gallery of art is a happy combination. Such high-minded philanthropy will keep the Corcoran independent, flexible, and unique.

Finally, for twenty-five years, the Corcoran Women's Committee has given both the museum and school a tremendous amount of help and encouragement. Scholarships for students, library resources, works of art, the Gallery Shop, the Education Department, and more have all flowed from this extraordinary group of women. Without them, the Corcoran would be a much different place.

The Annual Ball is, of course, the most stunning achievement of the Women's Committee. It has become a Washington institution. This year's gala is particularly significant because, as we have noted, it marks twenty-five years of service in the cause of fine art. The decorations have been donated by another Washington institution, Woodward and Lothrop, which will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 1980.

I hope you will join me in a heartfelt salute to the Corcoran Women's Committee and to those generous patrons and sponsors who have helped to make the 24th Ball so memorable.

Peter Marzio
Director

STELLA SINCE 1970

Few artists of the kind Frank Stella represents—artists who are launched early in life with important bodies of work, and achieve early recognition—can maintain a high level of accomplishment over the long haul. It is asking a great deal of an artist merely to continue over decades to produce good work; it would seem to be asking the impossible to expect him to make significant *change* in basic approach after two or three decades of intelligent effort. Stella has begun what is literally a second, or perhaps third, career with the several series of paintings begun in 1970 and continuing into the present. These works, which are in various media but are all *relief* paintings, are characterized by an almost vertiginous sense of riskiness, audacity, and eccentricity. Yet, they are full of Stella's typical control; they are so obviously conscious that one doesn't question their intentionality.

Three series of work are represented in this major exhibition: the so-called *Polish Village* paintings, made of collage elements on canvas or wood; the just subsequent *Brazilian* series, a group of aluminum reliefs begun in 1974; and the even more elaborate *Exotic Bird* aluminum pictures, dating from 1976. The Corcoran Gallery of Art's *Botafogo II*, 1975, is one of the key works from the middle group, and one of the major works from any facet of this artist's extraordinary career.

The reliefs, in contrast to the various series of paintings which preceded them, seem to deny the ascendancy of *flatness* and *literalness* which were held so essential to modernist painting in the 1960s. Instead, they establish increasingly more assertive statements about complexity, a baroque-like overttness of expressive color and shape, and they convey a sense of courting sculptural values. They do not merely sit and proclaim flatness and wholeness. This basic shift from the artist's own earlier position indicates perhaps a more general crisis of esthetic values in the mid and late 1970s—a crisis whose survivors are a mere handful of genuinely innovative and intrepid artists.

The exhibition "*Stella Since 1970*" was organized for the Fort Worth Art Museum by Curator Anne Livet; the accompanying catalogue contains an extensive text by Philip Leider and many reproductions. The Corcoran Gallery of Art is grateful to the organizers and to Mr. Leider for his clear and unusually imaginative analysis and is pleased to be able to present this key exhibition of the late 1970s.

Jane Livingston
Associate Director



Frank Stella, *Botafogo II*, 1975, 86 x 130", The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

MONTICELLI, HIS CONTEMPORARIES, HIS INFLUENCE

To discover Adolphe Monticelli (1824–1886) is to discover a crucial pioneer in the evolution of painting in 19th century France, from which so much of today's art springs. He greatly influenced both Cézanne and Van Gogh, for instance, whose works are considered by many to have formed modern art's dual cornerstones.

But Monticelli's work is significant for other reasons, too. His imaginary paintings of grandly costumed figures in elegant gardens were an important cultural bridge between the early 19th century Romantic interest in Watteau and the subsequent imaginary worlds created in art by the likes of Moreau, Gauguin, and Redon, and in literature by Proust, Verlaine, and Rimbaud. Moreover, his work sheds new light on some regional French art movements, particularly those blossoming around Marseille and Lyon, where Monticelli and other Provençal painters developed styles that were more modern even than the work of the Impressionists. These styles announced an interest in symbolism, the expressionistic use of color, and the heavily brushed surfaces of the followers of Van Gogh and the Fauves.

Despite his contribution, Monticelli has never been easily understood, nor has he ever fit neatly into the various categories of painters by which his better-remembered peers have been explained and defined. But he seemed to understand that

for a time, at least, such was to be his fate. At the end of his life, he told a friend that it would take years for critics and the public to comprehend and appreciate his paintings. "Delacroix painted twenty years ahead of his time," he said, "I am painting for fifty years in the future. It will take that long for people to see my paintings."

Although his career spanned the periods of both Realism and Impressionism, Monticelli remained faithful to the credo of the Romantics—to make art of fantasy and imagination, and to infuse one's creations with personal feeling. Indeed, he believed that painting should be a personal expression before all else, and that the artist should strive for uniqueness rather than assimilation within a movement. His approach probably was a close reflection of his imaginative, passionate personality and, at times, his apparently melancholic view of life.

Whatever else we read into Monticelli's paintings, especially those produced toward the end of his life, we cannot fail to see his originality. His work stands apart from that of every other artist of his generation. From his mid-50s until his death in 1886 at age 62, he gradually clarified his direction and moved toward a more abstract style. He loved rich colors, daring juxtapositions of saturated tones, and above all a surface roughness that invited the observer to follow in his



Adolphe Monticelli, *Return from the Hunt*, c. 1861, 20½ x 40½", The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., William A. Clark Collection

mind the artist's hand as he vigorously smeared and stroked his paint into place. Ultimately, his colors and textures came to act as barriers to viewing the subjects of his work. The paint, as paint, overwhelms the subject matter, and finally we learn to appreciate the *matière* as much as we do the subject or narrative.

Monticelli's pictures reveal him to be an intuitive, spontaneous painter, working quickly to cover his surfaces with jewel-like incrustations of color. Unlike the Impressionists of his period, he was able totally to let himself go, and thus freed was able to pursue hitherto uncharted artistic dimensions. By creating forms that functioned as color and surface reflections, he worked at the threshold of abstract art.

★ ★ ★

Aaron Sheon of the University of Pittsburgh organized this exhibition for the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh. The above statement was taken from Professor Sheon's Introduction to *Monticelli: His Contemporaries, His Influence*, which is both a catalogue of the exhibition and a definitive study of the artist.

The Corcoran has augmented the exhibition with works from its own collection and from the Phillips Collection. The exhibition at the Corcoran was made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., a Federal agency, and from the Women's Committee of the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

Edward J. Nygren
Curator of Collections



Adolphe Monticelli, *Testing the Fates*, c. 1860, 38¾ x 75¼",
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Edward C.
and Mary Walker Collection

THE CORCORAN SCHOOL OF ART

The School of Art makes the Corcoran unique amongst the museums and galleries of the city. Founded in 1890, the Corcoran School is one of the oldest art schools in the country and the only independent, professional studio school of art in the Nation's Capital. It is fully accredited as a Division 1 member of the National Association of Schools of Art.

Today over 200 students are enrolled in the Corcoran School's four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts degree or diploma programs with concentrations in Fine Art, Visual Communications, and Photography. At the same time, over 1,000 students participate each year in the School's Open Program, part-time courses given during the Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters. The School also offers two three-week sessions of summer study in Tenants Harbor, Maine.

In the studios and classrooms of the School, Corcoran B.F.A. Degree, Diploma, and Open Program students are taught by a faculty of professional artists, designers, and scholars. Its programs are innovative and students are challenged to learn and develop new avenues of creative expression. The School seeks to awaken visual curiosity and to encourage students to bring form to their ideas.

Each year, a portion of the proceeds from the

Corcoran Ball is turned over to the Corcoran School of Art by the Women's Committee. Over the years the Women's Committee has helped establish the school library and slide collection, provided audio-visual equipment, stone-lithography and other professional equipment for graphic design students, and given scholarship aid to over 100 students. This support and involvement has immeasurably helped the School to achieve its educational objectives.

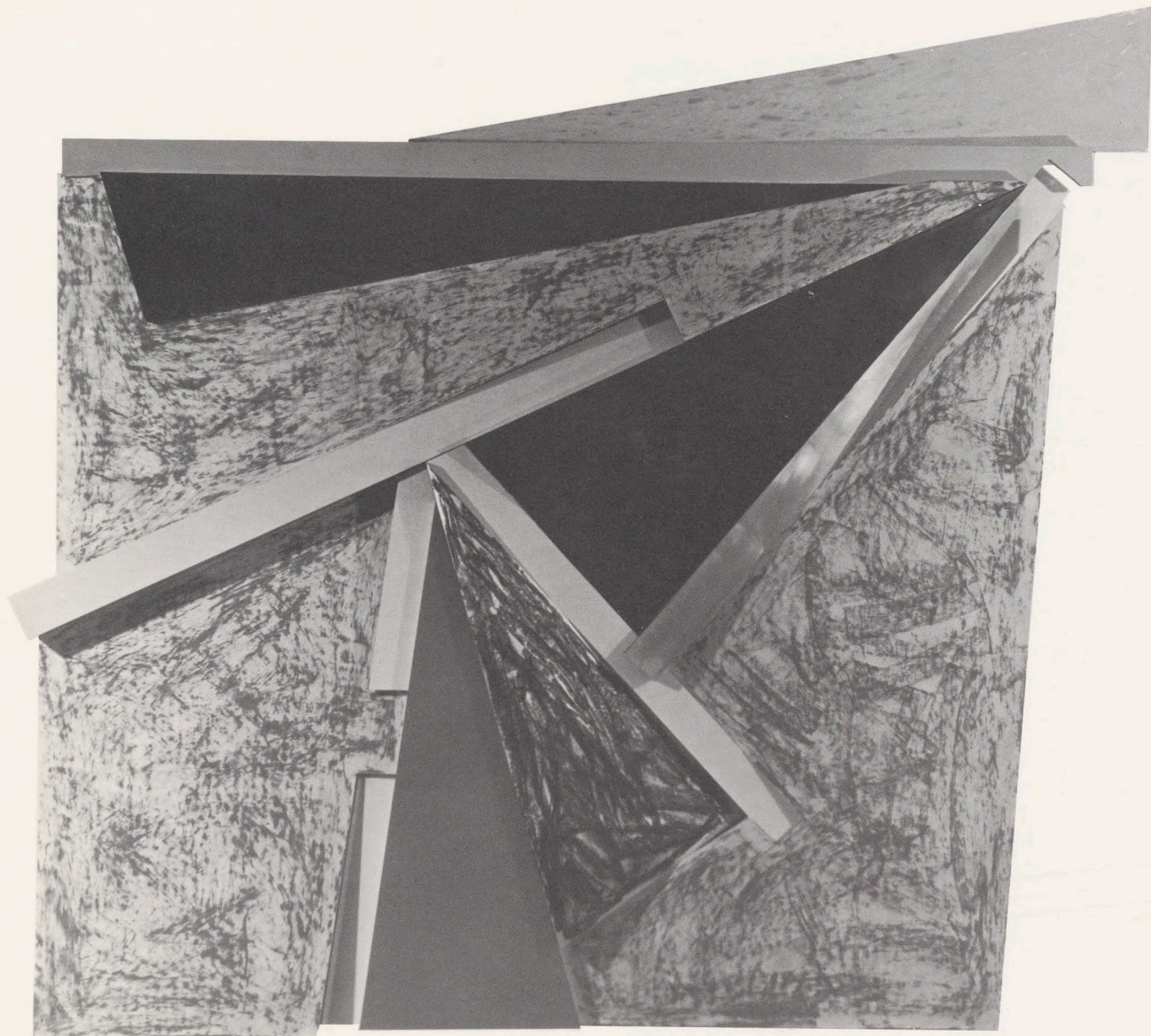
The Corcoran School of Art students, faculty, and staff extend congratulations and best wishes to the Corcoran Women's Committee on the occasion of its twenty-fifth anniversary. We look forward to working with the Committee in the years to come.

Peter Thomas
Dean

THE CORCORAN SHOP

The Corcoran Shop, established by the Women's Committee in 1972, has become an integral part of the Gallery. It offers a varied selection of art books, reproductions, posters, cards, and unusual gifts. All of these complement and enhance appreciation of the Gallery's collection.

Catalogues for both the Stella and Monticelli exhibitions can be purchased at the Corcoran Shop.



Frank Stella, *Morro da Viuva I*, 1975, 100 x 92", Collection
Dorothy and Richard Sherwood, Beverly Hills, California

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Frances Fralin, *Assistant Curator*
Linda C. Simmons, *Associate Curator of Collections*
Marti Mayo, *Coordinator of Exhibitions*
Martha Pennigar, *Curatorial Assistant*
Pamela Lawson, *Secretary to the Associate Director*
Elizabeth Punsalan, *Secretary to the Curator of Collections*
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Fern Bleckner, *Conservation Assistant*
Anthony Blazys, *Preparator*
James Opinsky, *Assistant Preparator*
Charles Vargason, *Carpenter*
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Kenneth Gibson, *Installation Assistant*
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